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AUTHOR	Wright, David E., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

It is stated that the United States is experiencing in the agricultural sector two simultaneous surpluses which together are referred to as the "farm problem:" these are surpluses of products and labor. The primary reasons for the labor surplus are relatively rapid adoption of technological innovations, the approximation of a competitive market structure which facilitates a "technological treadmill," and lack of an explicit manpower policy related to agriculture. Removing the excess labor from farming appears to be the only currently viable solution; other measures aimed at improving the conditions of agricultural labor are short-run and will eventually lead to reduction of the labor force. Whether or not the policy to move manpower out of agriculture is accepted, analysts agree that there is a need for research which focuses specifically on the agricultural labor force. Occupational mobility studies have served as a useful mechanism through which to perform this research. The paper concludes that two major possibilities exist: conceptual clarification and analysis of the heterogeneous quality of the agricultural labor force. (A six-page bibliography is included.) (Author/BP)

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A Modest Interdisciplinary Overview of the Farm Labor Problem with Some Suggestions for Future Research Efforts*

David E. Wright, Jr.[1]
Texas A&M University

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ABSTRACT

It is stated that the United States, given its current social framework, is experiencing in the agricultural sector two simultaneous surpluses which together are referred to as the "farm problem"; these are surpluses of products and of labor--the latter is of concern here. The reasons for there being a farm labor surplus are presented, the primary reasons being relatively rapid adoption of technological innovations, the approximation of a competitive market structure which facilitates a "technological treadmill," and lack of an explicit manpower policy related to agriculture. Given existing social frameworks of the society, removing the excess labor from farming appears to be the only currently viable solution; other measures aimed at improving the conditions of agricultural labor are short-run in nature and will eventually lead to reduction of the labor force. The rationale for reducing the agricultural labor force is developed and critiqued. Whether or not the policy to move manpower out of agriculture is accepted, analysts agree that there is a need for research which focuses specifically on the agricultural labor force. Mobility studies, specifically occupational mobility studies, have served as a useful mechanism through which to perform this research and also to relate agriculture to the larger society, but additional refinements are necessary. The paper is concluded by indicating several refinements and by showing how mobility studies suggest research possibilities related to agricultural manpower; two major possibilities are conceptual clarification and analysis of the heterogeneous quality of the agricultural labor force.

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PREFACE

The objectives of this brief paper are twofold. The early sections of the paper attempt to set forth from the viewpoint of the conventional wisdom a concise overview of the current United States farm problem, singling out for attention the labor aspects of that problem, and to specify the reasons and solution given for the problem. This solution is critiqued from both economic and sociological perspectives. Following this critique, the latter sections of the paper suggest some factors which need to be included in research and policy considerations concerning farm labor.

THE FARM PROBLEMS

The Industrial Revolution begun in the 18th Century and continuing today has produced consequences beyond all imagination. Among the most significant consequences has been the advent of "affluent societies," societies in which for the first time in the history of man the majority of people can lead a life of relative total security as regards obtaining the amenities of life (Veblen, 1899; Galbraith, 1958, 1967; Etzioni, 1968).

It would be an understatement to say that the arrival of such affluent societies has been accompanied by a discontent with, or at least a suspiciousness of, the systems of philosophies, social theories, and moral codes which we have inherited, systems overwhelmingly dominated by themes of scarcity as being the essential condition of life (Galbraith, 1958; Gouldner, 1970; Fulbright, 1970; Bendix, 1970; Taylor, 1968; Riesman, 1964). That there could exist a surplus of the necessities of life was unthinkable to the scholars of the recent past, for example Malthus, Ricardo, J.S. Mill, and others (Heilbroner, 1967). Yet, consider for example, the contemporary United States and one specific, very basic commodity: food. Given the moral, economic, and political framework of the United States, there currently exists in this country an apparent "surplus" of food, indeed, a surplus of agricultural products in general (Hathaway, 1963; Bishop, 1967b; Shepherd, 1963; Samuelson, 1964).[2] Our legacy of scarcity-theme theories are continuing to change to fit the current situations, but in the meantime, these theories provide us with "blinders" to certain neglected areas of the overall societal complex, or at least, have given little guidance in how to approach these problem areas.

The possibility of a surplus of food is astonishing to most people. How can there be a surplus? The answer, shorn of embellishments, is devastatingly simple: agriculture has been effective in incorporating the tools of the Industrial Revolution and, together with the utilization of new technology, this has resulted in a considerably more efficient agricultural operation (Fite and Reese, 1965).

The greater efficiency in agriculture, meaning greater output per unit of input, has resulted in freeing tremendous amounts of the factors of production---land, labor, capital and entrepreneurs---especially labor and capital, from agriculture and supplying them to other sectors of the economy; indeed, this transfer of factors from agricultural to nonagricultural sectors is one of the necessary dynamics in achieving an industrialized society (Heilbroner, 1972, 1963; Galbraith, 1967). This transfer of the factors of production is governed primarily by the rates of return to the various factors; over time, factors are utilized in economic sectors to such an extent that the rate of return to a given factor is adjusted to be approximately the same in all sectors of the economy (Hathaway, 1963; Samuelson, 1964; Shepherd, 1963; Watson, 1963). In agriculture, for example, in general, land and capital have gained rates of return which approximate those for nonagricultural uses of comparable land and capital (Hathaway, 1963; Shepherd, 1963).

But, here in the transfer process, an unexpected problem has been encountered; the transfer of manpower out of agriculture has not occurred fast enough to keep pace with the application of new technology and to adjust the rate of return to agricultural labor so that it is equitable to labor's return in nonagricultural sectors (Hathaway, 1963; Hathaway and Waldo, 1964; Shepherd, 1963; Bishop, 1967a).

In a capsulated, perhaps oversimplified statement, agriculture in the United States can thus be described as being an efficient industry in which there has resulted an excess of manpower and an excess of commodities; again at the risk of oversimplification, these two excesses constitute what is commonly referred to as the "United States farm problem." Each of these excesses, while closely interrelated, is analytically distinguishable and can be studied separately; this paper will concern itself with the manpower aspect of the farm problem.

THE FARM LABOR SURPLUS

The Economic Explanation

As noted, a key feature of the farm problem is the excess manpower remaining in agricultural production. In the simple and restricted terms of economic analysis, this surplus of manpower means that equilibrium between the supply of and demand for agricultural labor is substantially below the returns to labor in nonagricultural pursuits (Hathaway, 1963; Hathaway and Waldo, 1964; Phelps Brown, 1962). And, these relatively low returns to agricultural labor are not merely a recent phenomenon; agricultural manpower as a general category has long ranked among the bottom, if not the bottom-most, in terms of returns (Lianos, 1971; Blau and Duncan, 1967; Taylor, 1968). That the factors of land and capital engaged in agricultural production earn equitable returns relative to nonagricultural uses of these factors bears repeating; in terms of adjusting the supplies of the production factors, or the returns to them, the United States farm problem is a problem primarily concerned with manpower, specifically,

excess manpower engaged in agriculture and low rate of return to that manpower.

Why Be Concerned with Farm Labor?

Although there is a surplus of manpower in agriculture, bear in mind that all agricultural manpower constitutes only a small portion of the total labor force, four percent of a total United States labor force of 83 million persons (U.S. Department of Labor, 1971a). So why be concerned with such a small segment of the population? There are several justifications for such concern, a major reason being an historical, emotionally charged worry over the possibility of having a shortage of food in this country (Hathaway, 1963; Daft, 1971). Other justifications, some of which have recently been given renewed emphasis by the War on Poverty, are of an humanitarian type concern for the less fortunate in the society. And, another set of justifications, overlapping to a degree with the preceding, have to do with economically based concern for a section of the economy where serious imbalances persist.

In line with these justifications, it is informative to note the similarity of the agricultural labor force as an aggregate category as compared with another aggregate of people currently receiving much attention, that aggregate of people referred to as "poor." The two aggregates share many similarities along certain demographic characteristics: relatively low wages, as already indicated; comparatively low levels of educational attainment; high rates of unemployment and underemployment; larger families; over-representation of minority groups; relatively low levels of skills; and, others (Heady, et al., 1965; Keyserling, 1964; Soth, 1965; Hathaway, et al., 1968; Blau and Duncan, 1967.)[3]

Findings such as the above readily warrant additional attention to agricultural manpower. Beyond such gloomy demographic characteristics, however, the fact that the agricultural labor force is so small a segment and will continue to become even smaller serves, I think, to place the issue of agricultural manpower policy squarely where it belongs and where policy decisions which affect it are made, in the realm of value judgments. There may be no need for the society to be directly concerned with agricultural manpower nor to have an explicit policy aimed at improving its conditions. But, if this society is to take an active concern for the agricultural labor force, then what is to be the nature and direction of that concern?

Remove the Surplus Manpower: A Solution?

Overall, the attention or inattention and policy aimed at agriculture has had the effect of implying that the best way to improve conditions in agriculture would be to reduce the size of the agricultural labor force. That is, it would appear, again taking the economic, political, and moral framework of the United States as given, that from an analytical economic perspective, the ultimate long run solution to the surplus of agricultural manpower and the concurrent relatively low returns would be to hasten the

already existing---but too slow---movement of manpower out of agriculture (Hathaway, 1963; Hathaway and Waldo, 1964; Perkins and Hathaway, 1966; Lianos, 1971; Ponder, 1971; Daft, 1971; Fuller, 1961; Beegle, 1961; Williams, 1961). This is the recommendation shared and fostered by most analysts of the agricultural scene. The word "implying" is used because there is little manpower policy which applies to agriculture, most of the policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture being directed toward "land and capital"; these "land and capital" policies have the effect of displacing labor from agriculture, which is viewed as desirable (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1965; Hathaway, 1963; Tolley, 1971; Ponder, 1971; Daft, 1971; Rural Sociological Society, 1971).[4]

Rationale

A smaller agricultural labor force, according to this perspective, would result in several improvements. First, there would be fewer persons receiving the low returns which accrue to agricultural labor; this would represent a genuine improvement in that there would result fewer low-income, or poverty, families and individuals---that is provided those persons displaced from agriculture find remuneration elsewhere. Incidentally, the suggestion of encouraging or even forcing the excess manpower out of agriculture as a solution is usually accompanied by the assumption that those leaving agriculture will be absorbed by the larger economy, an assumption reserved for later comment. Second, a reduction in the size of the agricultural labor force should provide, through the effects of the laws of supply and demand, for some upward adjustment in the wages of those remaining in agriculture. Third, the rationale for moving manpower out of agriculture implicitly incorporates some notions about shifting manpower from the sectors of the economy where there are surpluses to sectors where shortages exist, thereby facilitating the overall efficiency and optimization of the larger economy (Samuelson, 1964; Lipsey and Steiner, 1969). This rationale is supported, of course, by the relatively low labor returns in agriculture. Such appears to be the overall rationale for reducing the size of the agricultural labor force. On its surface, the reasoning is impressive---which may account for the great amount of attention this solution has received, almost to the exclusion of other solutions, especially those which may seek to alter the social, economic, and cultural framework of the society (Veblen, 1921).

Related efforts

It is appropriate at this point to indicate several efforts on behalf of agricultural labor, efforts which could have more direct impact on improving the immediate situation of agricultural labor but which of themselves are not likely to provide long run gains. The more significant of these measures include: extension of minimum wage laws to agriculture; restricted entry of aliens who would perform agricultural work, usually at lower wages (Miller, 1971); selected unionization of agricultural workers; and, extension of unemployment insurance coverage to agricultural workers (Fritsch, et al., 1973). These measures are in varying

stages of implementation now and with varying degrees of coverage with the latter, unemployment insurance coverage, having the most comprehensive coverage and being the nearest to full operation. However, it can be noted that even proponents of these measures view them as short run attempts to bolster the low incomes of current agricultural workers while awaiting reduction in the future number of these workers. And, there have been considerable analyses, for example Heady et al. (1965), and Gisser (1967), to indicate that the long range effects of the measures suggested above will be to reduce or encourage the reduction of the size of the agricultural labor force.

Summary

In summary, it is fair to say that assuming that the frameworks of the United States remain as they are, and this assumption is the crucial point, it would appear that the only currently viable solution, indeed the ultimate solution for improving the returns to the agricultural labor force, is to reduce its size, while hopefully but as an afterthought placing those removed from agriculture in more remunerative employment.

Critique of "the" Solution

"Taking these variables as given"

That there are hazards in promoting, intentionally or by default, a monolithic policy of reduction in the size of the agricultural labor force as the solution to the farm labor problems is an understatement. A brief critique of this policy is set forth in the next section of this paper. The major flaw in the policy and the one most overlooked is the traditional qualification of social scientists in delivering their findings and recommendations: namely, the caveats---which are soon forgotten--- about "other things being equal," or "holding these factors constant," or "taking these variables as given." The difficulty is that these "things" are not constant---as a society, we do not have to take them as "given." This point will be discussed again later. Other shortcomings in the "reduce ag labor" solution include the following.

May increase both surpluses

To begin, it should be noted that with a reduction in the size of the agricultural labor force there exists the probability of actually exacerbating both farm problems, labor and food. A reduction in the size of the labor force can bring about a concurrent increase in the production of agricultural commodities as the twofold result of the even greater efficiency wrought by consolidating the holdings of smaller farmers leaving agriculture and by the replacement of the departing manpower with machinery (Hathaway, 1963; Heady, et al., 1965).

Higher wages: more automation

Further, the argument has been made that a smaller labor force in agriculture will, through the equilibrating mechanism of supply and demand, result in higher wages to labor; but, the advantages of this result are short-lived. Economists have repeatedly indicated that a change in the cost of a factor of production, such as higher wages for labor, changes the existing bases upon which decisions are made as to how much of any factor is utilized in the production process. As a factor becomes more expensive in relation to what it returns, there is increased pressure to find a relatively cheaper substitute for that factor. In the case of labor, the typical substitute is capital, or more crudely, increased automation, which in turn results in additional displacement of labor (Watson, 1963; Heady, et al., 1965; Lianos, 1971). The substitution of factors, especially the substitution of capital for labor, is a universal economic process, and not unique to agriculture (Watson, 1963; Lianos, 1971). However, the substitution process is particularly relevant to firms which face a competitive market structure, such as farms, and to labor which lacks protective techniques of unions, collective bargaining, and the like, such as agricultural labor (Watson, 1963; Samuelson, 1964; Bishop, 1967b). Heady, et al. (1965), summarizes the data depicting this substitution phenomena as it occurs in agriculture quite concisely, as have others (Hathaway, 1963; Lianos, 1971), referring to the process as a "technological treadmill."

Alternative jobs and aggregate demand

There are additional difficulties with the policy of hastening the exodus of manpower from agriculture. A major difficulty hinges upon the manner in which people leave agriculture, namely few specific provisions are made to help find acceptable new employment opportunities for those leaving agriculture (Daft, 1971; Ponder, 1971; Tolley, 1971). A partial explanation of why there are few such provisions lies in the concepts we have of the economy and society. We observe that returns to labor are lower in agriculture than in any other sector of the economy and that there is a surplus of labor in agriculture; from these observations we conclude that people should therefore leave agriculture for some other sectors and that they will be relatively better off in any other sector than they were before. Such conclusions are founded on the assumption that this shifting manpower will gravitate to sectors where labor shortages exist, thereby facilitating the overall efficiency and optimization of the larger economy, on the further assumption that those displaced from agriculture have skills and qualities marketable in the nonagricultural sectors, and lastly on the assumption that those displaced have the ability and willingness to migrate to other areas---to wherever there may be jobs. Each of these assumptions is questionable. First, the most efficient displacement of agricultural labor has historically taken place in times of rapid economic growth at the national level, efficient in terms of providing significant employment alternatives to those leaving agriculture; indeed, the rates of departure from agriculture have always been greater in times of relatively rapid economic growth (Baumgartner, 1965; Fuller, 1961). In the language of "push-pull" factors employed

by many rural sociologists, it is the "pull" factors of economic growth which have the most effect on both the rate at which people leave agriculture and on the possibilities of providing alternatives which represent meaningful improvement to those leaving agriculture. The reason for this is simple: growth means new jobs are being created. For these "pull" factors to operate, as expressed by labor shortages elsewhere in the economy, requires that there be a sufficient level of aggregate demand to sustain growth rates in the national economy (Mangum, 1967; Due, 1968; Committee for Economic Development, 1969), which in turn requires an aggressively pursued fiscal and monetary policy by the federal government. Yet, while the nation has the technical knowledge requisite to undertake an active fiscal policy, we as a nation have not demonstrated the willingness---with the exception of war periods---necessary to pursue such a policy (Center for Strategic Studies, 1967; Committee for Economic Development, 1968). Furthermore, the economy may now be entering a "slowing-down" period which will have a detrimental effect on improving the alternatives available to agricultural labor, unless agressive fiscal and monetary policies are implemented. In sum then, the position taken here challenges the easy assumption that to solve the agricultural labor problem it is merely necessary to "push" people out of farming. To remove people from agriculture with no attention to their attachment to the larger economy is no solution: to solve the manpower problems of agriculture will require recognition of the relationship such manpower has with the macro economy of the nation.

Skills, talents, and aggregate demand

The talents, skills, and other qualities of those leaving agriculture which may be marketable in nonagricultural sectors further demonstrates the need for an appreciation of the role of fiscal policy and the economics of growth. As an aggregate category, the agricultural labor force relative to other sectors of the labor force has lower skill levels. During periods of rapid growth, lack of skills is of less importance; a person still has several opportunities. But during periods of slower growth or of actual recession, the person with lower skill levels is at a constant disadvantage; this person must compete for the few available jobs against people more qualified than himself (Mangum, 1967).

Geographic mobility patterns

A major oversight occurs in not making explicit provisions to help those leaving agriculture to move to other areas. To those who view the agricultural scene with a middle class perspective, with its rather easy acceptance of geographic mobility, it is rather easy to say that many of the people engaged in agriculture would profit by leaving their present locations. This perspective fails to account for whether or not such people have the means necessary to move and just as important---if not more so---whether or not the people desire to move. As for physical ability to move, suffice it to say that persons having low incomes, perhaps experiencing unemployment, and with related attributes find it

difficult if not impossible to move. However, the psychological and social factors related to willingness to move are the more difficult factors for which to account. While not yet understanding the phenomena, social scientists have documented a tendency of many people to "identify with the land," or with a geographic area (Weller, 1965; Spicer and Thompson, 1972)---a phenomena which makes leaving no easy task. In a related manner, only recently it has been discovered that style of geographic mobility is different for various classes, with the styles for lower socioeconomic classes varying markedly from that of other classes (Choldin and Trout, 1971; Kleibrink, 1971; Lansing and Mueller, 1967; Shannon, et al., 1966; Weller, 1965). Persons from the middle and upper classes tend to migrate as individuals or single family units, readily adjusting to a new social environment, confidently calling upon a ready repertoire of social skills with which to meet the exigencies of the situation. Persons from lower classes, by contrast, tend to utilize a "frontier" pattern: a few individuals or families go first, learning whether or not and how they can survive in the new surroundings; if they are successful, then more families from the sending area join them, the original families serving to facilitate the adjustment of the new arrivals, and from the newly established "settlement," the migration may be extended again. And, even in those cases of successful lower class movement, there is the probability that should conditions in the "home" area warrant, because of new jobs or whatever, those who have successfully moved will return "home" (Weller, 1965; Marshall, 1972; Kleibrink, 1971).

Summary, Values, Other Solutions

The preceding has been a brief attempt to present the generally accepted position on how to solve the agricultural labor problem, to develop the rationale of that position, to indicate the assumptions underlying that rationale, and to critique that position and rationale. In short, the generally accepted solution is to remove "excess manpower from agriculture." The rationale of this position is impressive and is easily supported by the readily observable low returns to agricultural labor, which may account for the great amount of attention this solution has received, almost to the exclusion of other solutions, especially those which may seek to alter the social, economic, and cultural framework of the society. However, this solution is too facile: it rests on many unsafe assumptions concerning the psychological and sociological nature of man and also assumes several historically fluctuating economic factors to be constant. As important as correcting these misconceptions are, there is something more important: the collective values of the society as related to agriculture. These values have not been articulated; the social sciences in general have not addressed themselves to formulating a coherent set of values with which to guide policy. As a very striking example of both this lack of values and the role they could have, consider the following. A recent, detailed study of the structure of agriculture has concluded unequivocally that it is possible to provide this nation with more than sufficient agricultural commodities from either a structure characterized by a high degree of concentration or by one characterized by a low degree of concentration, with no significant change in price or quality for the consumer (Guither, 1972). That is, the consumer can have the same benefits from either a relatively small number of large farms

or from a relatively large number of smaller farms. Since either structure is possible and equally advantageous to the consumer, the structure we have in the future is a matter of choice, to be guided by our values---hopefully. But, current policies toward agriculture are such that they favor a high degree of concentration and are increasingly promoting more concentration (Guither, 1972; Daft, 1971; Hathaway, 1963), while simultaneously no one knows for sure just what we desire for agriculture.

Another example which will serve to demonstrate what is meant here by a lack of attention to articulating values occurs in reference to economics. Everyone knows what the national economic goals are: full employment; stable prices; and, continued economic growth. Occasionally, someone not too concerned over being denied the title of a "truly scientific economist" will throw in a pinch of a fourth goal concerning some minimum level of political and personal freedom. At any rate, this threefold set of economic goals are recited as litany in nearly all first rate economic texts (Due, 1968; Ferguson and Kreps, 1962; Lipsey and Steiner, 1969; Samuelson, 1964) and all economic activity is justified in the name of one or more of these ends. By contrast, where are our litanies of national goals from sociology, political science, and others? With few exceptions (Etzioni, 1968), even the effort to work in such an area is discounted.

While it is not the purpose of this paper to propose and argue for alternative solutions, it is the contention here that thought should be given to breaking the confines of our traditional approaches to problem situations and attempting to rise above the limiting assumptions of our disciplines. To be certain, there are other solutions to the farm problem (Daft, 1971; Heady, 1971), one of which could be the following example. An obvious solution, yet one often overlooked and usually soundly denounced when suggested, would be to leave agricultural manpower where it is, subsidizing an equitable rate of return where necessary, restrict new entry into agriculture while facilitating the existing trend toward a reduced agricultural labor force, and simply give away whatever surplus of commodities which might occur to less affluent nations. However, for whatever reasons, proposals of this nature have seldom appealed to policy makers of this or other nations; and, although certain aspects of such a proposal have been implemented from time to time, they have not been carried to the extent, nor implemented with the thoroughness necessary to have the ameliorative consequences desired (Hathaway, 1963; Fite and Reese, 1965; Galbraith, 1958).

THE NEED FOR DATA ON HUMAN FACTORS IN AGRICULTURE

Whether or not they collectively endorse the policy, even if it is an indirect policy, of reducing the size of the agricultural labor force, analysts are in agreement that their information on the human factors related to agriculture is deficient, especially in comparison to data on production functions, financial structures, biological phenomena, and similar aspects. There is as great a need to investigate social factors, for example, the characteristics of the entire agricultural labor force, particularly of those having the least adequate provision from agriculture.

However, without belaboring the point, it has been demonstrated that the majority of the activities of the agricultural agencies, such as those of the Department of Agriculture, are aimed either at those persons handling successful farm operations, or, primarily, at the larger holdings of land and capital, which results in attention going to these same successful persons---those whose future in agriculture is relatively assured, rather than to those smaller or less successful farmers and to farm workers whose future in agriculture or any economic sector is uncertain (Guither, 1972; Hathaway, 1963; Tolley, 1971; Ponder, 1971; Daft, 1971; Rural Sociological Society, 1971; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1965). To be blunt, the major thrust of research activities and concern is away from those facing the greatest difficulty in agriculture, although, what with the arrival of the "War on Poverty," there has been a renewal of interest in these agricultural groups (Keyserling, 1964; Fishman, 1966).

OCCUPATIONAL STUDIES AND AGRICULTURE

Somewhat filling the knowledge gap, especially with regards to relating agriculture to society in a macroscopic sense, have been studies of occupational mobility (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Lipset and Bendix, 1959; Bendix and Lipset, 1966; Smelser and Lipset, 1966). Accordingly, it is to be shown here that through the general apparatus of occupational mobility studies---but with refinements---a great deal of information relevant to policy decisions for agricultural and other types of manpower can be systematically investigated.

Critique

Categories too broad

But refinements are necessary. For example, while insightful summaries concerning agriculture can be gleaned from such occupational mobility studies, their usefulness is limited due to a flaw almost universal among mobility studies. The typical occupational mobility studies are not designed to give specific attention to agriculture, nor for that matter to any single occupational category, but rather to the broad patterns of movements across the entire occupational structure. Thus, and here is the flaw, such studies employ categories which, as concerns agriculture, are too broad, too general to be of much use for discriminating between types of agricultural manpower. For example, the usual procedure in mobility studies is to begin with a distinction between "manual" and "nonmanual" occupations, or between "blue collar" and "white collar" work, which is defensible as this distinction parallels differences among many social dimensions, such as prestige, income, education, illness, and others (Lipset and Bendix, 1959; Blau and Duncan, 1967; Shostak and Gomberg, 1964; Kadushin, 1966). If greater attention is given to differentiation within the broad manual-nonmanual categories, it generally does not include an improvement in terms of attention given to agriculture, as agriculture is usually represented by such all-inclusive categories as "farm" and "farm work" or at best a simple distinction between "farm owners and operators"

versus "farm laborers" (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Taylor, 1968; Wright, 1968; Lipset and Bendix, 1959).

Given the complexities involved in attempting to generate classificatory schemes which will encompass the occupational spectrum and the exigencies facing the researcher attempting to perform longitudinal or international comparative studies, there is little wonder that such broad categorizations as "farm work" or a mere dichotomization between "farm owner or operators" and "farm laborer" are used. However, while such procedures are in some cases absolutely necessary due to the needs and problems involved in rendering data from many diverse sources comparable, researchers have long acknowledged that they are aware that great diversity exists within their broad categorizations relating to agriculture (Taylor, 1968; Wright, 1968; Blau and Duncan, 1967; Baumgartner, 1965; Daft, 1971). Still, the generalizations regarding agriculture as a homogeneous category persist and agriculture fails to receive the amount of attention needed to clarify and pin-point the problem groups within it, nor for that matter the amount of attention given to other occupational categories---say, for example, the study given to distinguish among and stratify the variety of white collar occupations (Mills, 1951), or to trace the inflow and outflow of professionally employed persons, or to depicting and analyzing the lives of nonagricultural blue-collar workers (Shostak and Gomberg, 1964).

Low prestige, overlooked

A related shortcoming of macro occupational mobility and manpower studies as pertains to their relevancy for agriculture concerns still another manner in which agriculture is slighted: studies of mobility tend to be concerned with upward mobility and with rates of mobility into upper-level occupations; since agriculture per se is rather low in occupational classification schemes, it, as well as other similarily situated occupations, tends to be overlooked as a unit of analysis (Hodge, Siegel, and Rossi, 1966; Hodge, Treiman, and Rossi, 1966). A notable exception to these tendencies to slight agriculture is the work of Perkins and Hathaway (1966), although others appear hesitant to follow their lead.

Failure to integrate levels of analysis

Other areas of shortcomings in mobility and manpower studies as a general category---especially relevant from the perspective of sociology and social psychology---concern a lack of attention to the nature of the interaction which personality attributes and various social subsystem units have upon the mobility patterns and value orientations of individuals and, in turn, a concurrent failure to link these individual patterns with general patterns of "economic development" in the macro system, that is, the society (Parsons, 1951; Yinger, 1965). In other words, there are two typical procedures followed. One procedure is to utilize a highly individualistic, or micro, perspective which focuses upon describing the standard socioeconomic status features, such as educational attainment, occupation, and income, of individuals; the reasons for success or failure---

upward or downward mobility---are thus viewed as lying within the individual. This procedure fails to account for the influences from processes occurring in the society, from varying personality types and from various subcultural or subsystem units to which individuals are attached. On the other hand, the second, widely used procedure is to adopt a macro level perspective, but one narrowly economic in nature, from which to describe the end results of processes which affect mobility, for example, gross national products and rate of growth, rates of industrialization, capital investments, rates of unemployment, growth in per capita income, funding levels for various social programs, and so on. This procedure, while accounting for the influences of some societal processes, similarily fails to account for the influences from varying subcultural and subsystem units. Neither procedure can answer questions such as the following: "What is the nature of the linkage--if any--among personality types, cultural milieu, patterns of mobility, and rates of economic development?" "Do certain forms of group super ordinate - subordinate relationships result in predictable patterns of creativity, which in turn influence the nature of mobility?" "How does the pattern of structural development in a society influence the development of a predominant type of personality, which in turn has consequences for further structural change?" "What are the impacts of various political and legal structures upon rates of individual and group development?" "Are there particular sets of subcultural values which promote mobility while others hinder it?" "Does the work group and work context with which individuals are associated have any influence on mobility, and, if so, what is the nature of this influence?" Another problem with both procedures is that they imply that there is only one, universal pattern of success which is to apply to all persons. It would be interesting to begin with individuals located in various subcultural groups and to determine how "success" and mobility is variously defined by these groups.

In short, there needs to be attempts to do research which integrates these various levels of analysis (Parsons, 1951; Yinger, 1965). While most social scientists readily acknowledge the importance of such information, systematic research in these areas is slight relative to the traditional approaches. It is notable that the indicated shortcomings and the posed questions lie in the interstices between disciplines, in the realms which are easily dismissed--and hence tend to be dismissed--as "being interesting and important but impossible to research" or "as not conforming to the assumptions which form the foundation of this discipline and thus not our responsibility to research." Significant, stimulating exceptions do exist, however, as evidenced for example in the works of McClelland (1961), Hagen (1962), Riesman et al. (1950), Veblen (1899, 1921), Commons (1924), and others; unfortunately, such works are relatively few and seem to be ignored or misunderstood.

Occupational versus social mobility

While expounding the deficiencies of occupational mobility studies, reference must be made to the fact that occupational mobility is only one component of that more comprehensive process, social mobility. As social mobility is such an encompassing concept, problems are quickly encountered in attempting its measurement. This difficulty in measurement is partially

another example of the familiar paradox of balancing reliability against validity; that the researcher concerned with generalizations cannot do in-depth studies of the Oscar Lewis variety (1961, 1965) on a significantly large enough sample of respondents leads to attempts to narrow consideration to a few or even a single valid indicator of social mobility. The seemingly endless dispute over which of the available indicators is the best measure of social mobility is pointless; there is no such indicator, always valid, always yielding comparable information (Lasswell, 1965). Each different variable measures some different aspect of mobility, and thus the researcher must know what it is that he wishes to investigate and which variable or variables best approximate it. The mere fact that occupation is the indicator most frequently utilized for social mobility studies cannot be taken as an indication of its validity; one must consider the nature of the problem and the situation which he is researching.

Defense

But, now that the use of occupation as an indicator of mobility has been berated and the shortcomings of mobility studies in general have been indicated, what can be said in their favor? First, with regard to mobility studies, despite all noted shortcomings, such studies have not been applied in earnest and with vigor in the realm of agricultural manpower--so there is still much to be gained through their application here while at the same time improving the theoretical and methodological components of the studies (Baumgartner, 1965; Fuller, 1961). And, despite the narrowness of occupation in referring to overall social mobility, worthwhile indications of the extent and nature of the social mobility of the agricultural labor force can still be obtained for basically two reasons. First, of the many social variables, occupation is one of the more readily quantifiable--though not perfectly and not without validity problems of its own; this has added advantages for working with large populations and facilitates comparisons among various segments of the society. Secondly, occupation quite often is closely associated with other aspects of the social realm, e.g., educational attainment, income, prestige, style of life, attitudinal structures, and others (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Kadushin, 1966; Lipset and Bendix, 1959; Shostak and Gomberg, 1964); this latter fact about occupations seems to be especially true of the more industrialized world, of which the United States is an extreme example, where members of society are expected to work in order to earn money to pay for the necessities and luxuries of life.

OCCUPATIONAL STUDIES: A MEANS TO DATA ON HUMANS

From this point forward, a few of the research possibility suggested by the perspective of mobility studies are presented. These possibilities are illustrative, not exhaustive, and are directed at areas thought worthy of attention.[5]

Research Possibilities

Conceptual clarification

A worthwhile starting point in this area is conceptual clarification which is sorely needed with respect to agricultural manpower. Not only would the application of an occupational mobility framework aid in clarification, but to perform these studies properly would require that additional clarity be achieved. For example, the terms "agricultural manpower," "agricultural labor force," and "farm labor force" are commonly used interchangeably as being synonymous, even by experts, when, to the contrary, each refers to markedly different segments of manpower. The "agricultural labor force" is much broader than the "farm labor force," the latter term usually being employed to designate only those engaged in "first line production" agriculture while the former--"agricultural labor force"--includes the "farm labor force" and additionally refers to those engaged in "second line production," "processing," and agriculturally related concerns (Hoover, 1969). This explains the introduction of the term "agri-business," which may actually confuse more than it clarifies. It has been suggested that the new attention to agribusiness along with attempts to classify the occupations in this field will have low "pay-off value" as these occupations are not significantly different from similar ones related to other areas of production and the currently existing occupational classification schemes are sufficient (Sturt, 1972). According to this same source, the attention to agribusiness is diverting effort from "first line production" agriculture, or the farm labor force, where there has been relatively little work done on differentiation of occupations, specification of job requirements, and up-grading of jobs, but where rewards for such work would be the greatest.

To say there is a distinction between the "agricultural" and the "farm" sectors appears trite and therefore seemingly to engage in the trivial. Such is not the case as evidenced by a recent, richly endowed, regional project the directors of which were experts and who were interested, among other things, in studying several dimensions of the "farm labor force" and then comparing these with non-farm agricultural components; but, the project was flawed in this respect because many of the instruments used elicited responses which refer merely to "agriculture."

The term "farm labor force" itself needs refining, as there is not consensus as to what it refers, being used at times to include, at others to exclude farm owners and operators. In its most generic use, the term farm labor could be said to apply to all who earn all or a part of their livelihood from production agriculture--farm owners, operators, managers, foremen, and farm workers of all types. Such a wide application of the term can be justified in that people in all these categories do receive a return for their labor input. Including owners in the term farm labor force can redirect attention to many smaller farm owners whose single largest input in production is their own labor, but who, because they are labelled "owners," are excluded from consideration under "labor" policies (Heady, et al., 1965; Hathaway, et al., 1968; Soth, 1965; Lianos, 1971).

Unfortunately, the scope of most research is narrowly focused upon investigations of "workers" only, or ambiguously upon "agriculture." Such situations are due to lack of imagination and foresight.

Heterogeneity in agriculture

Closely related to the necessity for clarification of concepts relating to agriculture is the high degree of heterogeneity acknowledged to exist among persons subsumed under the agricultural label. While "agricultural" or "farm" labor in general is a "problem cateogry," not every agriculturally employed person belongs in this "problem category." Greater attention needs to be given to specifying the heterogeneity and differentiating among the varying types of persons engaged in agriculture, thereby pinpointing the problem groups which exist within agricultural manpower. Occupational mobility studies lend themselves well to such an undertaking, providing as they do a general framework of synthesizing concepts and analytical procedures, suggesting the dimensions along which to stratify agricultural manpower. One could go beyond only describing the dimensions of heterogeneity which exist by demonstrating the social significance of these differences through an analysis of the occupational mobility patterns existing within agricultural manpower, utilizing both objective and subjective measures to depict the mobility patterns, and relating these patterns back to the major structural differences within the agricultural labor force.

A "caste" within agriculture?

This type of research should be wide open and ripe for some innovative approaches. For example, recall the aggregate comparison made earlier between the agricultural labor force and the "poor." To that earlier synopsis can be added the general finding from occupational mobility studies to the effect that most mobility between generations occurs across one or two steps of the occupational hierarchy (Smelser and Lipset, 1966; Lipset and Bendix, 1959; Blau and Duncan, 1967; Berelson and Steiner, 1968). One is then struck with the possibility that there may exist an agriculturally oriented caste within the agricultural labor force. Or, in other words, there may exist or be developing a "circle of agricultural labor" from which it is increasingly difficult for succeeding generations to escape. The idea of a caste-like agricultural labor force, or at least the possibility of there developing such a caste, is given increased likelihood by series of findings such as the following. First, demographers have indicated that the great migration from rural to urban areas and from agricultural to non-agricultural employment has supposedly depleted the ranks of those capable of migrating to urban areas and to non-agricultural jobs; those remaining are more or less trapped where they are because of not possessing characteristics conducive to leaving (Bishop, 1967a, b; Perkins and Hathaway, 1966; Schultz, 1967; Fuller, 1961). Second, the greatest rates of leaving agriculture for other employment have historically occurred during periods of economic expansion; the fact that the United States is currently experiencing a

slow-down in the rate of growth and difficulty in maintaining full-employment would indicate increased difficulty in leaving agriculture for those still there (Schultz, 1967; Fuller, 1961; Hathaway, 1967; Perkins and Hathaway, 1966; Daft, 1971; Heady et al., 1965). And, finally, economic policies of the United States have traditionally and currently been oriented toward the earnings of capital and land rather than on the earnings and difficulties of labor; such emphases away from those experiencing the burdens of the farm problem do little to improve their conditions (Schultz, 1967; Hathaway, 1967; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1965; Lianos, 1971; Ponder, 1971; Daft, 1971). Whether or not there in such a caste is an empirical question, and just one illustration of the type of research that might be performed.

Typologies

Another possibility worth exploring would be the attempt to create a set of heuristic typologies of agricultural workers; this would follow naturally from the work on descriptive analysis of the labor force and would parallel past and current developments of typologies of farmers and of various sectors of the farm economy (Fritsch, 1973).

Improvement in Variables

Ethnicity

In addition to bringing increased attention to the farm labor force, there should be improvements in the breadth and depth of the studies. One avenue to this is to upgrade the variables included for research. Ethnicity, for example, is increasingly being incorporated as a research factor; along these lines, use of ethnicity needs to be encouraged, particularily increased attention to Mexican Americans as well as Blacks.

Family

Other factors which might be considered include more attention to less obvious aspects; for example one might consider an investigation of farmers or farm workers using the family as the unit of analysis, or perhaps, develop, through research, the concept of "work role." Using the family as the unit of analysis could proceed by collecting data on family size, a work history on each member of the family noting whether the work performed was farm or non-farm and whether temporary or year round, and total earnings of each member of the family.

Work role

The term "work role," which is meant to be a more inclusive term than occupation, is used here as a broad, sensitizing concept to refer to all aspects related to the performance of work; "occupation" is thus but

a single component of "work role." Attention could be devoted to differentiating among components of the work role, to portraying the variations among agricultural workers with respect to these components, and to interpretation of their significance. Components of the work role can be divided into two categories on the basis of objectivity. Objective information might include: detailed information on actual work performed, industry or type of business in which performed; total earnings by industry and occupation; similar information for a possible second job; migration status; and, perhaps others. Variables of a subjective nature can embrace the respondent's preferences for performing farm versus non-farm work, reasons for doing farm work, likes and dislikes about current job, and where applicable, reasons for performing seasonal work, reasons and preferences for doing migrant work, and an indication of whether or not the respondent thought he could have continued any non-farm work he might have recently performed.

As related to generational studies

Gathering data on both subjective and objective dimensions would also improve the quality of generational mobility studies, which almost traditionally utilize primarily objective data. Equally if not more important as objective patterns of mobility are the attitudes and orientations of the respondents toward these patterns, toward themselves, and toward their children. The "likes" and "dislikes" about one's job, mentioned above in connection with work role, are also of importance here. Another subjective area of investigation, related to generational mobility, pertains to personal status orientations: What do farmers and farm workers desire for themselves in connection with culturally prescribed goals, such as occupation, education, and income? What do they expect? Are they making explicit efforts to achieve their goals, and what sacrifices would they be willing to make to gain these goals? In a similar manner, what do farmers and farm workers desire and expect for their own children? How do these projections for their children compare with the personal projections of the parents, or with the actual pattern of mobility experienced by the parents?

As regards objective data on generational mobility, the design of a study in this area would contribute most by incorporating a design to allow both inter and intragenerational analyses. Intragenerational analysis obviously proceeds by establishing the career patterns of individuals, but care must be taken to include a sufficiently long occupational history; this caution also applies to soliciting data on occupation of parents for intergenerational objectives. An additional facet of the intergenerational concern would be to investigate the occupational statuses of siblings of farmers and farm workers (Butler, 1970).

And, lastly, taking agricultural workers as the focal point for study, in contrast to more traditional approaches which focus on the entire occupational category (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Lipset and Bendix, 1959), can be expected to contribute to filling the void on this group of workers--a group who definitely warrant the attention.

FOOTNOTES

1. The author appreciates the critical comments from Carlton R. Sollie and Harold F. Kaufman of Mississippi State University and from William P. Kuvlesky and Conrad F. Fritsch of Texas A&M University in response to an earlier version of this paper; the author also benefited from discussion of related material with Michael F. Lever.

2. It is indeed a paradox that on the one hand scholars can point to a surplus of food in the United States, to storage bins bursting with excess food which is often wasted, to unused excess capacity of the farm sector, and on the other hand can indicate that even within the affluent United States society a significant portion of people suffer from malnutrition and starvation (Coles, 1969; Fishman, 1966; Gordon, 1965). When the scope of analysis is broadened beyond the United States, the paradox of excess food and concurrent starvation is even more ironic; malnutrition and starvation--shortages of food--are still "stalking specters" for many of the world's people (Heilbroner, 1963; Myrdal, 1957). In order to state that there is a surplus of food, anywhere, one must of necessity add the conditional statement--the apology?--about "taking the political, economic, and social framework of this society as given!"

3. Data are not readily available for the aggregate referred to as "agricultural manpower" due to inadequacies in operationalization of concepts. For example, the Bureau of the Census classification "rural farm" was originally intended as a measure referring to those employed directly and primarily in agriculture; however, it is widely recognized that, among other shortcomings, many persons live on a rural farm while being primarily employed in non-agricultural pursuits. For a critique of concepts referring to the agricultural labor force and proposals of alternative schemes, see Hathaway, et. al. (1968).

4. See especially the Rural Sociological Society entry for an extensive and current bibliography of materials pertaining to discriminatory practices of the U. S. Department of Agriculture (Rural Sociological Society, 1971).

5. Some of these possibilities were suggested by the author's involvement in regional project NE-58, "An Economic and Sociological Study of Agricultural Labor in the Northeast States," and particularly in discussions with Vernon Ryan and Rex Warland of Pennsylvania State University, Ward Bauder of Cornell University, and William Kuvlesky of Texas A&M University. Indeed, there may be some opportunity to accomplish a few of these possibilities.

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